EMPLOYMENT MUST BE CENTRAL GOAL IN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT FORUM

Following is the address by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the Global Employment Forum, sponsored by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Geneva, 1 November 2001:

I am delighted and honoured to be speaking at this Global Employment Forum. And I am especially glad to be doing so at this crucial time.

Just over a year ago, Member States of the United Nations gathered at the Millennium Summit to set out an agenda for the twenty-first century -- a plan for achieving freedom from fear, freedom from want, sustaining the resources of our planet and renewing the United Nations. They pledged to free their peoples from "the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion people of them are currently subjected" and resolved "to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one dollar a day".

Just over a month ago, tragic events brought home to us that our complex world has become even more uncertain, and that the need for the international community to work together in confronting new threats is greater than ever before. The impact of 11 September is now reverberating around the world. A sense of vulnerability, and a search for appropriate responses, are reshaping international relations.

The ramifications of 11 September go far beyond peace and security concerns; they will also have a severe and multiple impact on human security. Nobody can forecast with precision the economic and social consequences. But we already know that poor economies will pay the highest price. We know millions of people will become more vulnerable to poverty than before. Our mission to improve the lives of peoples everywhere has become more important and urgent than ever.

We may never be able to say exactly how much worse the global economic outlook has become because of the 11 September tragedy; how many more millions of people have lost or will lose their jobs as a result; how many fewer will be able to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

But we can say that the consequences of these events -- in terms of falling commodity prices, political tension, lower oil prices, lower investment, loss of tourism/revenues, escalating trade costs and movements of refugees -- will take their toll on many of those who
can least afford it. The World Bank already estimates that a further 15 million people could find themselves living in poverty next year. And you at the International Labour Organization have calculated that more than 24 million will become unemployed, the vast majority of them in the developing world.

We can say that greater and more focused efforts will be required urgently, if we are to stand any chance of meeting the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration.

And we can say that the only way to meet our Millennium goals is to ensure that globalization works for all. In our interdependent global economy, that means we must work together and work better together. It means we must rebuild and strengthen the confidence on which international economic integration depends.

Only when we put people at the centre of everything we do will we enable men and women in cities and villages around the world to make their lives better. Only then will we know that globalization is becoming inclusive, allowing everyone to share its opportunities.

The ILO's work on the social dimensions of globalization can play an important part in advancing that objective. I know that a working party of your governing body is meeting next month to discuss that very issue, and I look forward with interest to the outcome.

In any development strategy aimed at spreading the benefits of globalization, employment must be a central goal. Freely chosen, productive employment, in conditions of human dignity and decency, is the very foundation on which social stability rests.

That requires us to work in partnerships. No country, and no single actor, can take on these challenges alone. Governments cannot do it without business; and business cannot do it without labour and civil society at large. We need genuine coalitions for change, in which all of us unite our efforts behind a common purpose.

Many promising approaches built on this principle are already taking shape. One of them is the subject of discussion at this Forum. The Global Agenda for Employment calls for an alliance of the United Nations, the specialized agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions, national policymakers, employers and trade unions. It rightly defines this approach as the only way to achieve one of our most central development goals: putting jobs at the centre of economic and social policies, in order to create more opportunities and decent work for all.